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SEMIOTICS OF THE END: TURBO-VIOLENCE

NECROPOLITICS DIGITAL, GLITCH, IMAGE, NOISE, VIOLENCE

The image cannot present itself without a certain force, without a certain amount of violence. The image must always remove, put aside, place another image behind itself, to come to light.

The image of the Sun is, in this regard, the cruellest one since it always presents itself only by obliterating all other images, even itself. It is only after a certain time, according to the Platonic allegory of the *Republic*, that the image of the Sun and its daylight may be in plain view.

Today, there is no more time left for the image to come into sight. In the words of Jean Baudrillard, an image is not even allowed the short time to become an image. There are no signs, but only the buoyancy of the economy; there is no exchange, but rather immediate sharing. Auto-play and infinite scroll are the technologies of this virulence: the violence of the image that disappears in the flux of images, in the turbo-reproduction of more and more signs.

TURBO-VIOLENCE

The futurist violence of speed, the hyper-futurism of competition, the virulency of the cyber-economy.

Today violence is not, strictly speaking, *in* the image but in the buffer *between* one image and another. This hyper-capitalistic form of violence is not only the violence of information but the virality of advertisings, of fast fashion, of digital influence, the virulence of pop culture and its hyper-competitive and quick-changing *hits*... In each instance, in each example, there is no image: only the speed of capitalism and its reproduction.

It is not possible to speak about an *image*, as if in the singular form. Minute after minute, it is more and more difficult to slow down, to pause, to go back to the ideality of the still image — perhaps to what Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* refers to as Photograph with a capital *P*. *The*

capital of the image is already moving, as if in an infinite semiosis. Then, images cannot signify the end because images do not finish and never stop finishing.

The glitch of the medium, too, is only another image, a twitch of the eye. The noise of the glitch is already decoded and re-encoded fast and smoothly: the violence between images is restored. To paraphrase Byung-Chul Han, *it is almost impossible to shut the eyes anymore*; it is almost not even possible to blink.

The image makes violence to itself. As Jean Baudrillard remarks in *The Violence of Images*, *Violence against Images*, the image is the medium of violence whose message is and can only be more violence.



If the image cracks, like in Kanye West's *Welcome to Heartbreak* (2008) (2:13), there is another picture already available (2:15). There is almost no more time for the image and its imaginary: everything changes but there is no becoming. This is why there is perhaps no image in *Welcome to Heartbreak*, only the violence to images, the never-ending destruction and reproduction of more images ("I've seen it / I've seen it before / I've seen it / I've seen it before / I've seen it / I've seen it before...").



The image ends and images do not finish the reproduction of their *end* (that is, capital): only this time *faster*, more *violently*. The *hot glitches* of A\$AP Mob's *Yamborghini High* (2016), for example, where the images morph into one another, the pixels bleed in an endless flow of signs and semicapital. Violence reproduces itself at the turbo-speed of the machine: "catch a nigga flyin' by in a Lambo."

Variation after variation, the reproduction of the images is smoother and cleaner. There is no roughness in the virality of semicapitalism. Just like in 100 Gecs' *Money Machine* (2019), this new violence is like "Big boys coming with the picture / Feel so clean like a money machine."

CYBERTIME AND CYBERSPACE

Cybertime is the amount of time necessary for an image to become an image: the time necessary to think, to feel, to remember, to imagine. But as soon as the reproduction of the images exceeds cybertime, as soon as images *overflow* memory and imagination, there is no more possibility for storage or re-routing, only for more reproduction.

Cybertime crashes. There is no more time in the images, only reproduction without production, because the new is often too slow, too large to upload. (*Error: new.exe cannot be opened.*) The newness of the glitch, too, is reproduced so fast that it is only another, oft-emulated, form of violence with neither time nor memory (for example, Reddit's Super Bowl commercial, where the company's orange and white logo pops up for an instant in the midst of a 6-seconds advertisement).

Cybertime is rebooted by cyberspace. The only reaction is one of virtual immediacy. 'Accept', 'deny', Like, swipe up, click... The bleep of the machine. "Semicapital puts neuro-psychic energies to work, submitting them to mechanistic speed, compelling cognitive activity to follow

the rhythm of networked productivity. As a result,” Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi reads in an article from 2010, “the emotional sphere linked with cognition is stressed to its limit. Cyberspace overloads cybertime, because cyberspace is an unbounded sphere whose speed can accelerate without limits, while cybertime (the organic time of attention, memory, imagination) cannot be sped up beyond a certain point—or it cracks.” As communication is reduced to information, feelings return as affects, only because the latter reproduce faster and more smoothly in cyberspace.

It is not then only the image that withdraws into the spectacle of capitalism; the spectator, too, disappears amid the overflow of the images. There is not enough space available to upload a new imaginary.

PUNCTUM AND AFFECTUM

Today, everything is to become visible, to be felt. Fewer and fewer images are seen, less and less is being felt. Trillions of images are stored and reproduced every day. But as the number of images is multiplied, imagination itself is removed. As Susan Sontag comments in her book about images and the representation of violence, “after [six] decades of big-budget Hollywood disaster films, ‘It felt like a movie’ seems to have displaced the way survivors of a catastrophe used to express the short-term unassimilability of what they had gone through: ‘It felt like a dream’” (p. 19). Violence is uploaded into cyberspace, although there is not enough space for fear or shock. Dreams are reset.

There is not even danger in the images, no poignancy. Images lack what Roland Barthes called the *punctum*, the singularity of the figure, the punch of emotion. There is no risk of damage in the images, except that of simulation. Images are too smooth. There is no aesthetic difference anymore, no punctuation, between image and viewer. Images are no different from the eye.

The medium of the images produces *affectum*. Affection is faster than feelings. Its reproduction is immediate (by contagion, or virality). There is no time left, then, to imagine, to feel, to think — almost not even the time to stare. “The affectum,” writes Byung-Chul Han, “*shouts and excites*. All it produces are non-verbal excitement and stimuli, which cause an immediate liking” (p. 39).

TO GLITCH VIOLENCE

If the picture is violent in part because “*it fills the sight by force*,” (p. 91) as Roland Barthes affirms in *Camera Lucida*, it also overwrites the imaginary with a similar force.

To revolt, to expose, to denounce the violence against the imaginary, it is therefore needed to imagine an alternative *violence* that does not just accelerate the image but its fierce medium, with the hope that it cracks, reboots, and glitches into a new imaginary.

The *glitch* represents a violence against the flow of information. For Rose Menkman, glitches “bring any medium into a critical state of hypertrophy, to (subsequently) criticize its inherent politics” (p. 11). Noise against more noise, turbo-violence against glitched violence.

Glitches will, nonetheless, always be reproduced and neutralised by the flow of more images.

They are going to become fashionable, glamorous. The crackdown is *temporary*, after all. This is not just a limitation, though, but the cause of the glitch *moment(um)*: “the potential any glitch has to modulate or productively damage the norms of techno-culture, in the moment at which this potential is first grasped” (p. 8). “The concept of moment(um) is twofold: first of all there is the moment, which is experienced as the uncanny, threatening loss of control, throwing the spectator into the void (of meaning). This moment then itself becomes a catalyst, with a certain momentum. Noise turns to glitch when it passes a momentary tipping point, at which it could tip away into a failure, or instead force new knowledge about the glitch’s techné, and actual and presumed media flows, onto the viewer” (p. 31). The glitch moment(um) has the power to crack cyberspace. And perhaps, the *longer* its moment, the *greater* its momentum, its impetus.

On 11 September 2001, the CNN’s website went down for several hours: the catastrophe of cyberspace. The capitalist flow of images ends. At the same time, the imaginary of the end reproduces itself. The spectators dream about the end in a dream without images, similar to sleep.

The image returns to nothingness, nothingness to the image, so that it is not possible to differentiate between them anymore. Like a black sun, the glitch abolishes the difference between image and non-image, function and error. Neither the indifference of the *affectum* nor the disturbance of the *punctum*.

The eyes are almost shut and nevertheless, *there is* an image — the hypernothingness of the black screen. The idleness of meaning.

Whatever is left there after the image has disappeared, whatever remains *after the end*, is only imaginary.

THE POETICS OF THE VIRUS

“What can we learn from a computer virus? A computer virus corrupts data. A computer virus costs capitalism. It degrades productivity within the machine. A computer virus is a threat to the function of the machine and its economy. [...] Machines are expected to work well and work quickly. A computer virus triggers the machinic response of slowness in ways that are unpredictable to the user: endless buffering, crashing, damaging, deleting, reformatting. This slowness shifts time and space, altering a person’s relationship to the machine” (from Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism*, p. 111).

This slowness, this violence to the economy of the machine, further reboots the relationship with the imaginary. The virus, like us, dreams a dream without images that is almost sleeplike. It imagines a new template of the end, a series of zeros and ones converted into imaginary numbers. From the short circuit of reproduction to the imagination of open circuits.

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